

Beyond Siri: Dictation tricks for the iPhone and iPad



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You're probably familiar with using Siri to make calls on your iPhone, as well as to open apps on your iOS device, [get information](#), and [set up appointments](#). But you may be less familiar with iOS's other dictation feature, the one that lets you talk to your iOS device while it converts your words into text.

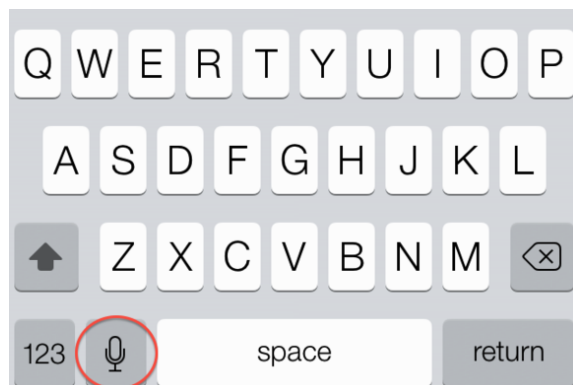
I've long used dictation on my iPhone, because I have fat thumbs and find the keyboard too slow to use. As long as I'm in a not-too-noisy environment, it works quite well. I have to make corrections at times, but I can dictate long emails, short text messages, and even use dictation to enter search terms in Safari or to enter text in text fields on webpages. Better still, in my early tests, dictation in iOS 7 seems much more accurate. Here's how you can use dictation on an iOS device and save a lot of time typing.

Turn on dictation

First, you need to make sure dictation is turned on. To do this, go to *Settings > General > Siri*, and then turn Siri on. Even if you don't want to use Siri's personal assistant features, you need to turn it on for speech recognition to work. You can choose which language you're using here, which is especially useful if you speak with an accent. I live in the United Kingdom, but since I'm American, I set the language in Siri's preferences to *English (United States)*. However, I set my *Region* settings to reflect UK dates and times. (Tap *General* and then *International*).

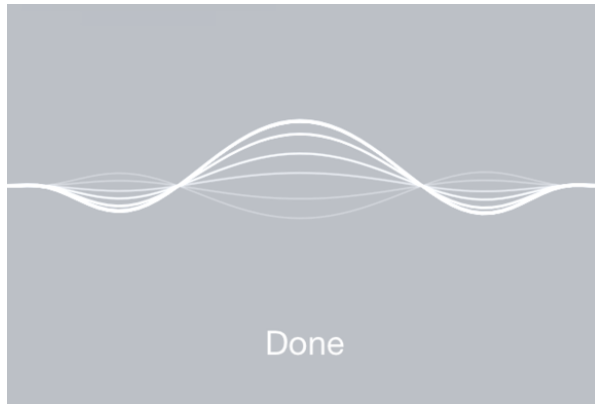
Dictate anywhere...almost

You can dictate anywhere in iOS where you can enter text. For example, you can compose emails, dictate texts, and even dictate search terms in Safari's search field. Any time you see the small microphone icon next to the spacebar on the iOS keyboard, dictation is available. Just tap anyplace you can type text, and then tap the microphone icon to start dictating. When you're finished, tap *Done* and then wait for your words to be processed. It can take a few seconds for text to appear.



Whenever you see the microphone icon (circled), you have the opportunity to dictate.

Stay in the zone: If you're using iOS 7, when you begin talking, you'll see a feedback pane with a wavering line showing the volume of your speech. The louder you speak, the greater the amplitude of the wave. (If you're using iOS 6, or you're using an app that hasn't been updated for iOS 7, you'll see a microphone; as you speak, the microphone will fill with purple light.)



When you begin talking, you'll see a feedback pane with a wavering line showing the volume of your speech. The louder you speak, the wider the

Talk into the microphone: You don't need to speak very loudly; but you should keep your iPhone close to your mouth, especially if you're outdoors. There are two microphones at the bottom of the iPhone, and a single microphone on iPads, located at the top of the device. It's not easy to speak directly into the iPad mic while looking at the screen. Speak into the tiny hole at the top of your tablet.

You'll find dictation in noisy environments works much better with an iPhone, because it's easier to speak close to the microphone. The iPhone also has a noise-canceling mic, which filters out background noises. You might find that the Apple earbuds that come with an iPhone—which have an inline mic—offer better speech recognition, as do third-party headphones with mics, as long as you hold them fairly close to your mouth.

Dictate when connected to Wi-Fi: Dictation to an iOS device requires that your voice be sent to a server, where it is recognized and transcribed, and then sent back to your iOS device. For this reason, dictating to an iOS device works best when you're using Wi-Fi; it also works well with a 3G connection; but anything slower is hit or miss, in my experience.

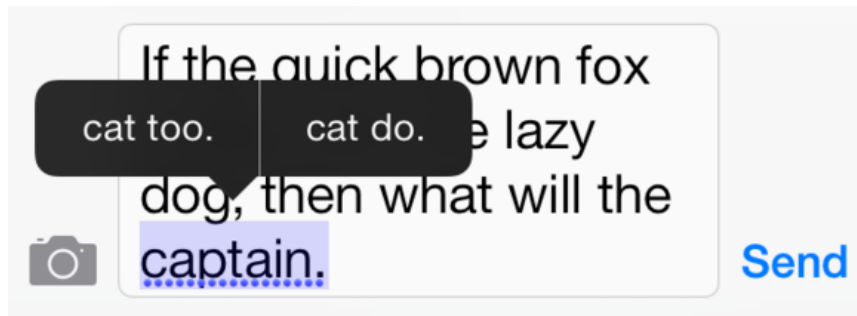
Dictate efficiently

If you're familiar with dictating into software such as Nuance Software's \$160 [Dragon Dictate](#), you already have an idea of how to dictate into an iPhone or iPad. But some desktop techniques don't work. Here are a few tips to make dictation more efficient.

Speak clearly: You don't need to speak especially slowly, but speaking too quickly will lead to errors. The general idea is to talk like a newscaster: Enunciate, but don't exaggerate.

Don't say too much: Your voice has to be sent to a remote server, so keep your dictation segments under 30 seconds. (Longer than that might be too much for a 3G connection.)

Take advantage of autocorrect: While you can't correct mistakes in iOS dictation by voice, you will occasionally see words that iOS thinks might be incorrect. They appear with dotted blue lines underneath them. Tap an underlined word or phrase, and you'll see one or more options you can choose from.



Make a mistake? If you tap a word underlined in blue, iOS will offer suggestions.

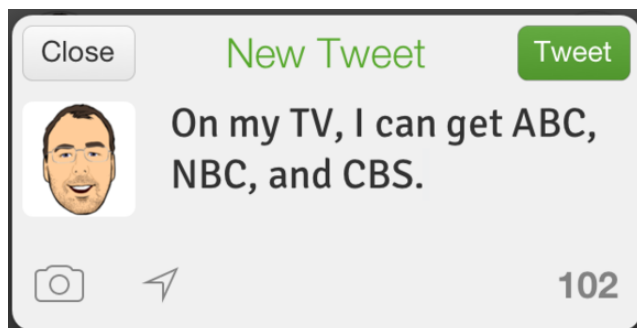
Speak punctuation and symbols: To include punctuation in your dictation, you need to say “comma,” “period,” “hyphen,” and so on. Watch out for language differences. For instance, if you’re using British English, you need to say “full stop” instead of “period.”

You can say “new line” to dictate a return character, and “new paragraph” to add two returns. You say “apostrophe” for a possessive noun, such as “Jerry Garcia apostrophe S guitar,” for *Jerry Garcia’s guitar*.

You’ll also say things like “dollar sign,” “euro sign,” and “pound sterling sign” to get type the corresponding symbols.

When you want to capitalize a word, say “cap.” If you’re sending a message to someone about a movie preference, for example, you might say “I’d like to watch cap lord of the cap rings.”

Use acronyms with care: You can dictate some acronyms, but not all. You’ll find over time which ones work and which don’t. When spelling acronyms, make sure to pause between letters just enough for them to be discrete.



If you need to include an acronym in your dictation, give it a try. Often iOS will understand what you’re saying as long as you pause slightly between letters.

Add emoticons: Do you want to type smileys? It’s easier to dictate them than to switch to the number keyboard. Just say “smiley,” “winky,” or “frowny,” for :-), ;-), or :-(.

Proofread what you dictate: While some errors will be obvious, and other misinterpretations may have blue dotted lines highlighting them, there will be typos—or, more correctly, speech-os.

As you get used to dictating into your iPhone or iPad, you’ll figure out the right cadence and volume to get the most precise recognition. If you need to type a lot on an iOS device, try using dictation. Whether you use it for text messages or emails, it may save you a lot of time.